



Blue Ridge Parkway News

Dear Neighbors and Visitors,

I am pleased to send you this second newsletter concerning our comprehensive planning effort for the Blue Ridge Parkway. Our mailing list continues to grow, and so I know that some of you didn't receive our first newsletter, which was distributed earlier this spring. For this reason, some of the important information is repeated in this newsletter. You can find Newsletters 1 and 2 on the Internet at <http://planning.den.nps.gov/plans.cfm>.

We are still in the very early stages of a process to develop the parkway's first General Management Plan—a long-range plan that is required for every unit of the National Park Service. You will have many opportunities to contribute ideas and comments as we progress through the process. Because of the scope and complexity of the plan, we don't expect to be done with the plan and its accompanying Environmental Impact Statement until sometime in 2005 (there is an outline of the process and timeline in this newsletter).

I encourage you to take a few minutes to read the information presented here and then to share your ideas with us by filling out the response form. If you prefer you may comment via the Internet at the address above, or simply email us at blri_gmp_eis@nps.gov. Your input is very important to the success of the plan. I'd like to thank those of you who have already offered comments, and I hope you will continue to participate throughout the planning process.

I look forward to hearing from you.

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(Click on **Blue Ridge Parkway** in the list of Active Planning Websites. Then click on **What's New** to find the list of publications.)

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Park planning is a decision-making process, and general management planning is the broadest level of decision making for national parks. General management plans are required for all units in the national park system and are intended to set the park's management direction for the next 15 to 20 years. A core team of parkway staff and National Park Service planning professionals is coordinating the Blue Ridge Parkway general management plan. Participation by the full parkway staff, parkway partners and neighbors, and the general public will be crucial to the planning effort's success.

Planning in the national park system is organized around three primary questions: **WHY** was this park established (what is the overall mission of this park)? **WHAT** is the vision for the park's future (what kind of place do we want it to be)? and **HOW** do we accomplish our future vision (what actions are needed to create desired future conditions)?

Why was this park established?

Answers to the WHY question form the foundation for the plan. All concepts and actions in the plan must be consistent with this foundation as it is based on legislation and National Park Service policy. For the Blue Ridge Parkway, the planning foundation begins with statements of parkway mission, purpose, and significance. These were presented in draft in newsletter 1. The planning team will refer to the planning foundation to direct and test each step of the plan as it progresses. Parkway managers will use the foundation statements to help make operational decisions long after the plan itself is completed.

What is the vision for the future of this park?

Developing a vision for the park's future (answering the WHAT question) is the primary role of the general management plan. It is on this step that the planning team spends the most time and where ideas and comments from you are the most important. The general management plan looks years into the future and considers the park holistically in its full ecological and cultural context and as part of the surrounding region. Several possible visions for the park's future (called alternatives) are developed and analyzed before a preferred direction is selected. Evaluating a set of alternatives enables us

to compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of one course of action over another, and provides the sound approach to decision making required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

How do we accomplish our vision for the future?

Although it may be necessary in some cases to include specific actions in the general management plan, most HOW questions are answered in future implementation plans. For example, the desired conditions to be achieved for the park's natural and cultural resources will be described in the general management plan, but specific actions to manage resources will be identified in resource management plans. Overall goals and conditions to be met by the parkway's interpretive and educational programs will be established in the general management plan, but specific themes and required media or other facilities will be detailed in an interpretation plan. Any current implementation plans for the park will be evaluated and revised as necessary to be consistent with the new general management plan.

Thank You for Your Responses to Newsletter 1

We appreciate the comments and thoughts we received in response to the first project newsletter. This newsletter was distributed in April and May and asked for comments on statements about the parkway's purpose and its significance. Most respondents indicated agreement with these statements, and some people mentioned that the statements reflected some of their own feelings about the parkway. A few suggestions for editorial improvements were received, and several comments encouraged greater emphasis on specific aspects of the parkway such as its unique design elements and the park's recreational opportunities. These comments will be considered by the planning team, along with input from natural and cultural resource experts in the Blue Ridge Parkway region.

If you did not receive Newsletter 1, the purpose and significance statements may be found on the Internet at <http://planning.den.nps.gov/plans.cfm>. These statements may continue to evolve throughout the planning project. You will have additional opportunities to help us improve these statements.

Help Us Define the Scope of the General Management Plan

The planning team has identified a preliminary list of issues or problems that the Park Service is facing or may face in the future at the Blue Ridge Parkway. These issues were identified in conversations with park staff and representatives of other government agencies near the parkway. The general management plan will establish a framework for making decisions about these issues for the next 15-20 years. It is important that the plan be as comprehensive as possible. We need to expand this list of issues to include your ideas, hopes, and concerns about the parkway's future.

Please use the attached response form to help us add to and refine this list of issues that the plan will address.

- There are financial and technological challenges to protecting and maintaining the original parkway design. Some people believe that certain elements of the design should be allowed to change while others value keeping the parkway exactly as it was originally intended to look.
- The ecological role of parkway resources in the context of the central/southern Appalachian region may have changed over time. For example, regional wildlife habitat is increasingly fragmented from roads, trails, and development. Are there ecological implications for how the parkway should be managed or used?
- Development outside park boundaries effects parkway scenery and other resources, visitor's experiences, and local economies and quality of life - sometimes in opposing ways.
- There are many opinions and concerns about parkway traffic and safety, including appropriate traffic levels and size of vehicles on the motor road and the need for and inconvenience of winter closings.
- Some people believe that the park has a responsibility to provide visitors with more information about adjacent services (gas, food, lodging, etc); others are concerned about the potential for proliferation of signing and advertising that could negatively impact visitors' experiences on the parkway.
- Bicycling enthusiasts would like to see more cycling opportunities on the parkway, but there are also safety concerns about bikes and cars sharing the roadway.
- Some parkway facilities are crowded at times while others seem to be underused. Some facilities can accommodate larger vehicles and some cannot. What is the appropriate level and distribution of facilities to provide for visitor needs and efficient park operations?



General Management Plan Process and Timeframe

STEP and TIMEFRAME

PLANNING ACTIVITY

PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

WE
ARE
HERE →

1 FALL 2001

Initiate Project

The planning team assembles, begins to identify the project's scope, customizes the planning process, and begins to establish contacts with participants

2 WINTER 2001-SUMMER 2002

Define Planning Context and Foundation

The team examines WHY the park was established and affirms the area's mission. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public comments.

Read newsletters and send us comments. Help us build a mailing list.

3 SUMMER 2002-SUMMER 2003

Develop and Evaluate Alternatives

Using staff and public input, the team explores WHAT the park's future should look like and proposes a range of reasonable alternatives. Read newsletters and send us your

ideas and comments. Come to public meetings.

4 FALL 2003-FALL 2004

Prepare a Draft Document

A draft general management plan and environmental impact statement is published. The draft document describes the alternatives and the impacts of implementing each. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified.

Read the draft plan and send us your ideas and comments.

5 WINTER 2004-SUMMER 2005

Publish Final Document

Based on review by the National Park Service and the public, the team revises the general management plan/environmental impact statement and distributes a final plan. The plan is approved in a published Record of Decision.

Read the final plan, including NPS responses to major public comments and official letters.

6 SUMMER 2005 AND BEYOND

Implement the Approved Plan

After the Record of Decision is issued, and as funding allows, the general management plan is implemented.

What's Coming Next?

National Park Service policy requires general management plans to describe specific “management prescriptions” for each particular area of a park. Management prescriptions describe desired resource conditions and visitors experiences and include statements about the appropriate kinds and levels of management, use, and development for each prescription. These management prescriptions provide the foundation for all subsequent decision making in the park and are the core of the general management plan. To allow for a meaningful level of specificity, management prescriptions are applied either to different geographic areas in the park (management zones) or are applied park-wide, such as prescriptions related to air quality, regardless of where it occurs in the park. Most parks have both kinds of prescriptions.

The planning team will be working on developing draft management prescriptions for the Blue Ridge Parkway over the next several months. You will have an opportunity to review and improve these draft prescriptions. Then the planning team will develop a range of possible future scenarios for the parkway by applying the prescriptions (zones) in different areas of the park. These scenarios (called “alternatives”) will be used to compare and contrast the consequences of making different decisions about the parkway’s future. Eventually, a preferred direction will be selected as the final plan. The preferred direction could be similar to one of the alternatives or could be entirely different. You will have opportunities to comment and contribute ideas along every step of the way.

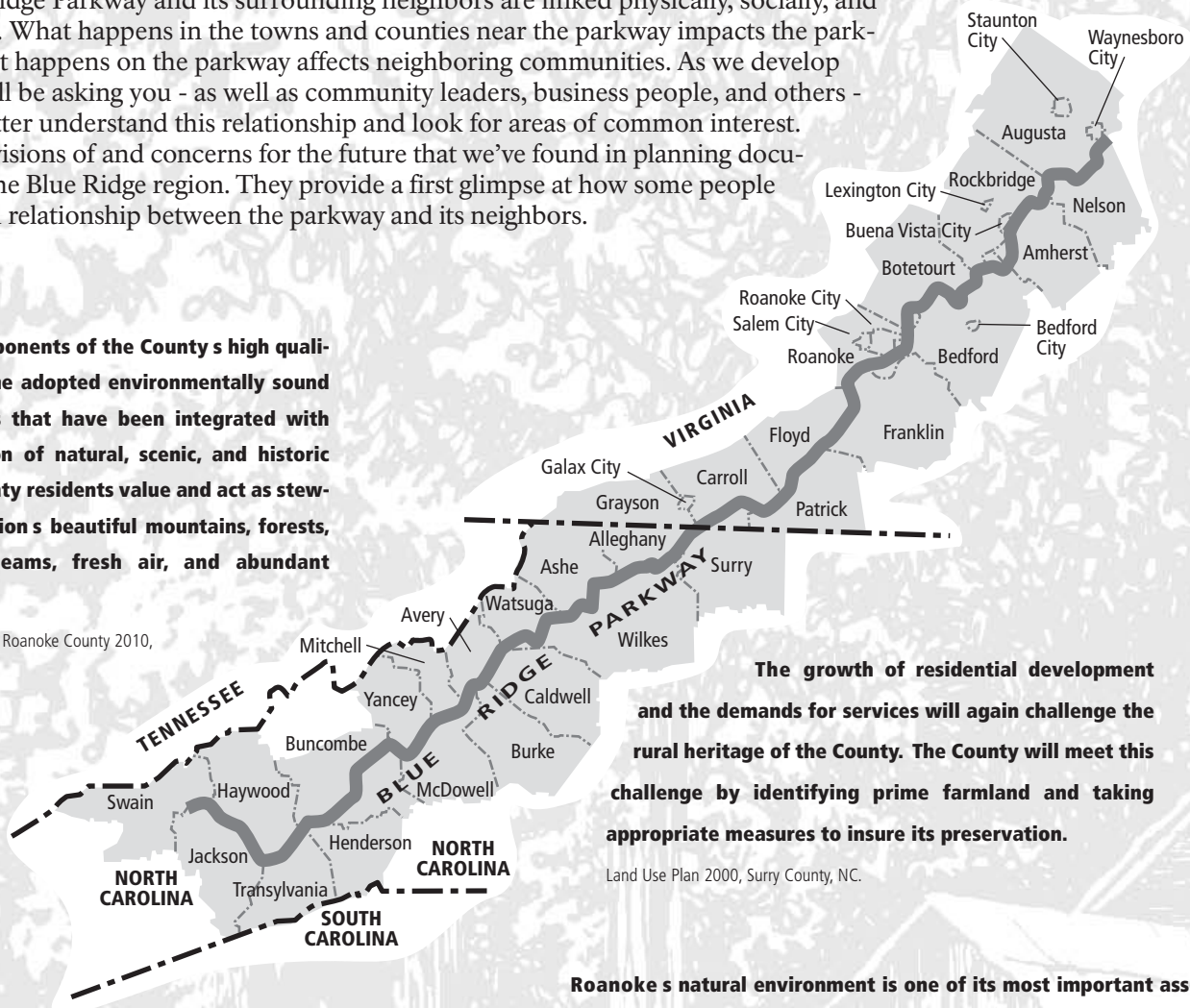
Sharing Visions; Finding Common Ground

The Blue Ridge Parkway and its surrounding neighbors are linked physically, socially, and economically. What happens in the towns and counties near the parkway impacts the parkway, and what happens on the parkway affects neighboring communities. As we develop this plan, we'll be asking you - as well as community leaders, business people, and others - to help us better understand this relationship and look for areas of common interest.

Below are visions of and concerns for the future that we've found in planning documents from the Blue Ridge region. They provide a first glimpse at how some people see the linked relationship between the parkway and its neighbors.

Critical components of the County's high quality of life are the adopted environmentally sound growth policies that have been integrated with the preservation of natural, scenic, and historic resources. County residents value and act as stewards of the region's beautiful mountains, forests, rivers and streams, fresh air, and abundant wildlife.

The Changing Century, Roanoke County 2010, Roanoke County, VA.



The growth of residential development and the demands for services will again challenge the rural heritage of the County. The County will meet this challenge by identifying prime farmland and taking appropriate measures to insure its preservation.

Land Use Plan 2000, Surry County, NC.

The natural beauty, scenic vistas, and environment of Nelson County are treasured resources.... Future generations should be able to see the blue sky and mountains as we do today...

Vision Statement from Community Forums, Comprehensive Plan (draft as approved by Planning Commission) 2001, Nelson County, VA.

Roanoke's natural environment is one of its most important assets. The City's location amid the Blue Ridge Mountains, combined with access to natural resources such as the Roanoke River, Blue Ridge Parkway, Smith Mountain Lake, and parks provide a natural environmental quality in an urban setting. Consequently, how the region conserves and protects the natural environment is particularly important to the quality of life for Roanoke's residents. Regional cooperation and joint environmental programs and protection policies are essential to maintaining the natural environment residents enjoy.

Vision 2001, Comprehensive Plan, City of Roanoke, VA.

The largest industry in Watauga County is tourism. Each year thousands of people come here to escape the congestion of their hometowns and to see the beauty of the mountains. As we cut down the mountains to make room for more development, are we running the risk of hurting this valuable industry? Shouldn't we stop and think about what we are doing to our beautiful land?

Report from the Watauga County Blue Ribbon Commission on Growth. Issues 2000, Watauga County, NC

In the months ahead, through newsletters like this and public workshops, we shall examine these different views of the region and its future. Through these comparisons we hope to forge a common vision for the parkway and its role in the region.

Working Together to Preserve the View

Visitors and residents value the parkway corridor's scenic beauty. Views of rural farmsteads and forested mountains draw more than 20 million visitors each year and generate \$2.3 billion annually in tourism spending. But, these views are changing as North Carolina and Virginia become increasingly desirable places to live, work, and play.

To understand what views we need to protect, planners from the parkway and local jurisdictions are working with residents through a three-step process to map and evaluate views found along the parkway:

Step 1. Sensitivity Mapping—The Park Service and North Carolina University used computer mapping to identify sensitive areas that are visible from up to 1 mile from the parkway. The entire parkway has been mapped.

Step 2. View Area Mapping—As a follow-up, the sensitivity mapping was field checked and plotted on topographic maps. Only two sections of the parkway need yet to be completed.

Step 3: Scenic Quality Assessments—In the final step, county officials are asked to identify citizens who can team up with Park Service staff to rate the scenic quality of the view areas (identified in step 2). These citizen assessments have been completed for all the view areas currently mapped.

The ultimate goal is for the parkway and its partners to understand where the important views are and what steps each can take to protect them for the benefit of visitors and the quality of life of area residents.



Announcing Public Open Houses

Please join park staff and planners in an informal setting to learn about and discuss planning for the Blue Ridge Parkway. You are welcome anytime during the hours identified below.

Monday, September 23, 2002
3:30 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Ingleside Hotel Resort & Conference Center

1410 Commerce Road
Staunton, VA 24401
540-248-1201

Best Western Hotel

Blue Ridge Plaza
840 E. King Street
Boone, NC 28607
828-266-1100

Tuesday, September 24, 2002
3:30 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Vinton War Memorial

814 Washington Avenue
Vinton, VA 24179
540-983-0613

Folk Arts Center

382 Blue Ridge Parkway
Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7928

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Denver Service Center - Ann Van Huizen, PSD
12795 W. Alameda Parkway
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225-0287

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